

very young, and she was brought up in a nearby Augustinian monastery at Mount Cornillon. In 1206 she entered the community as a nun. There, her favourite and most ardent devotion was to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. At the same time she began to have a recurring vision of a bright moon crossed by a single black band. She could not see the significance of this until she had a dream or vision of Our Lord explaining to her that the moon stood for the Church's Calendar of feasts, the Christian year, which was marred by the absence of a day to celebrate the Blessed Sacrament. When she was elected prioress about 1225 she told some of her friends about the earlier visions. These friends encouraged her to confide to a local canon, whom she asked to consult some theologians about the idea of inaugurating such a feast.

Although these theologians agreed that there was no theological objection to a feast as she had it in mind, she met with opposition of some who were suspicious of her visions; eventually she had to leave the monastery and the town, and she died as a hermit in 1258, having apparently failed to achieve her mission.

However, one of the theologians consulted on the question was elevated to the papacy in 1261 as Pope Urban IV. He was approached by some of Juliana's friends and agreed to their request that a Feast of the Blessed Sacrament be instituted for the whole Church. This he did by the Bull *Transiturus de Hoc Mundo*, issued from Orvieto on August 11, 1264.

So this feast which we celebrate today is an expression of reverence and love for Jesus Christ as we acknowledge his presence in the Holy Eucharist.¹

Exploring whom and what we reverence in this sacrament we have to speak of Christ as priest and as sacrifice for the whole world. Recently a prominent voice in the Episcopal

Church has urged that we drop this language of sacrifice as crude and barbaric. But I suppose that there are crude and barbaric ways of expressing and practicing any truth. I am just barely old enough to remember “democracy” being rather crudely and barbarically expressed and practiced during the McCarthy years. That did of course nothing at all to alter the real meaning and value of the concept of democracy.

Whenever we talk about sacrifice in the conventional religious sense, our minds habitually go to some gory image of a blood-drenched priest bargaining the innards of an animal for a change in the weather, or, as Mark Twain once put it, some Polynesian tossing his mother-in-law (with great regret) into a volcano in hopes of a better coconut harvest. But the Christian doctrine of sacrifice reaches far behind these manifestations of our created need to offer, and reaches to the basic purpose of our being.

We were created to live in union with God and each other. Put in terms of our celebration today, we were made to find fulfillment when we respond to God with all our heart, mind, and action. Another way to put this is, that we were made to live in joy by offering our wills to God in all that we are and do. The almost entirely forgotten doctrine of original sin is the simple observation that we do not do this, but have a metastasized, deformed, sense of self-preservation that keeps us from loving God with all of our will. We fall far short of the living sacrifice that St Paul described; simply put, we find that we cannot completely surrender ourselves to God—and the truth is, the secret truth is, that for each of us there are areas of our life we would be very reluctant to let God meddle with at all. Am I the only one who feels so?

We feel the separation, and we know that our nature and our actions divide us from God, distance us from what we were

made for: to know and love God. No amount of self-hate, flagellation, psalm-singing, or anything else can cross the gap, because we know what we hold back, we know even our best moments of the intent to give ourselves to God last a short time, forgotten with an ease that may frighten us.

So the word, the wisdom, the love of God was made flesh, our flesh, in Jesus of Nazareth. He lived among us, yet, startlingly, without sin. Practicing tender love toward the down-trodden, tough love towards those who needed to wake up, prophetic love to those who needed to hear of the Reign of God, he settled for ever the question of what human life was to look like.

And then he, the real Human Being whom the prophet Eze-kiel described, did what we cannot do, he surrendered his will completely to God even when that meant death. As we read the passion narratives we can see every kind of human sin at work—Jesus bears the sins of the world in the most literal, most un-metaphorical sense possible. And his love stays constant, his prayer in Gethsemane at the moment of his greatest distress and doubt is “Father not my will, but thine be done.” That is the prayer you and I find impossible to live out even in quiet Western European or American comfort, and there he is, sweating blood, saying the words we were created to say.

In that mood of self-consecration, he had just taken the elements of the most common Jewish sacrifice, the meal sacrifice shared with God, usually called the Sacrifice of Thanksgiving in our Bibles, and connected those elements to himself, to his sacrifice, and told us to lift the bread and cup when we share them, to make his memorial. And memorial means to keep present with us the Saviour who consecrated himself to do for us what we cannot do.

“Salvation” is recognizing that Christ has done what we cannot do, and acting on that realization. It is a recognition that frees us from the terror and anxiety of knowing that we are not able to do what we were created for. In doing so in that eternal moment of offering, Christ remains our great high priest, our pontifex—and this means bridge-builder—making in the wilderness of our souls a highway to God.

Unlike Adam in the garden, I don’t have to hide from God because of my shame or disability to love him with all my heart and soul and mind, because Christ has done what I cannot do. That’s why the letter to the Hebrews says that we can with confidence enter the presence of God Almighty. What a change, what a relief! There is no room in the religion of the letter to the Hebrews for the self-hater, no room for any but those who confidently step across the bridge that Christ has built, and approach God with love and joy.

And so, as commanded, we offer, as Jesus and the disciples did that last night, praise and thanks to God who redeems, restores, forgives. The sacrifice and the priest are eternally with us in this act and in this food that he gives us. The prayer book catechism puts all this very succinctly: “The Church’s sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving is the way by which the sacrifice of Christ is made present, and in which he unites us to his one offering of himself.” We make our intercessions, we offer ourselves, by, in, with, and because of the sacrifice of Christ. As a Christian believer I can say that poor as my love us, unworthy as I am to offer to God any sacrifice, I can pour out my poor love, sing my off-key praises, love God in the partial and limping surrender of my mediocre life, here as we lift the bread and cup to God. The opportunity we have simply to lose ourselves in adoration during the liturgy is a privilege beyond all price—

and yet it is a gift. It is a taste of paradise lost and heaven yet to come.

We come to this altar with confidence because we have in Jesus Christ a High Priest who sympathizes with us, loves us, and knowing that we are people of physical senses, is with us in a way we can feel, gaze upon, and touch. Most of all, he is with us in a way that nourishes us for eternal life today.

I hope it has become quite clear that what we are talking about isn't crude or barbaric. I know that it rather is life, freedom, and salvation, this drawing near to God through the great High Priest. I also know that primarily it is not something to argue about, but something to experience, share, and enjoy.

Blessed praised worshipped and adored be our Lord Jesus Christ on his throne in heaven, in the blessed sacrament of the altar, and in the hearts, minds, and lives of his faithful people. Amen.

ⁱ With regard to what follows I am greatly indebted to the Rt Revd Paul Marshall, Bishop of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.